



# Parliamentary Procedure Cheat Sheet.

A one-stop reference for motions, points and amendments in Congress. Print it, keep it in your folder, and learn the exact words to say. Vote requirements vary by league, so confirm yours.

## How motions work

In Congress, a **motion** is a request that the chamber do something. Congress procedure is modeled on standard parliamentary procedure such as Robert's Rules of Order, adapted for the event. NSDA publishes a table of frequently used parliamentary motions, and the thresholds below follow it where noted. In most chambers a member stands, is recognized by the PO, and says "Motion to ...". The PO does not usually ask whether anyone has a motion.

Many motions need a **second** (another member agrees the idea should be considered) and then a **vote**. The thresholds below are common, not universal. Check your tournament rules.

## Common motions

| MOTION              | WHAT IT DOES                                             | TYPICAL VOTE                                                                    |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lay on the table    | Sets aside current legislation to take up something else | Majority                                                                        |
| Take from the table | Brings tabled legislation back for debate                | Majority                                                                        |
| Previous question   | Ends debate and moves to a vote                          | Two-thirds                                                                      |
| Amend               | Changes wording of the legislation                       | One-third second, then majority vote                                            |
| Recess              | Short break                                              | Majority                                                                        |
| Adjourn             | Ends the session                                         | Majority                                                                        |
| Suspend the rules   | Sets aside a procedural rule for a specific purpose      | Two-thirds                                                                      |
| Extend questioning  | Adds time to the current questioning period              | Two-thirds in some summaries; not allowed where time limits cannot be suspended |
| Roll call vote      | Asks for each member's vote to be recorded               | A one-fifth second in one summary; varies                                       |

Lay on the table, take from the table, previous question, recess, adjourn and suspend the rules match the NSDA motions table. The amend, roll call and extend questioning entries come from a secondary summary (Wikipedia) and vary. NSDA national scorer instructions say speech and questioning time limits cannot be suspended.

## Points: quick questions to the chair

A **point** is a short, immediate request to the PO. Points generally do not need a second, and the PO decides them. Names vary: the NSDA motions table lists 'rise to a point of order or parliamentary procedure' and 'rise to a question of privilege,' and leagues may use other labels such as personal privilege or inquiry.

| POINT                            | USE IT WHEN                                                                            | SAY                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Point of order                   | A rule is being broken                                                                 | "Point of order." Then state the rule.                                               |
| Point of personal privilege      | Something affects your comfort or ability to take part (cannot hear, room temperature) | "Point of personal privilege."                                                       |
| Point of inquiry                 | You have a procedural question                                                         | "Point of inquiry."                                                                  |
| Appeal the decision of the chair | You think the PO ruled wrongly                                                         | "I appeal the decision of the chair."<br>Chamber votes (majority in the NSDA table). |

### Use points sparingly

Judges notice students who use procedure to help the chamber and notice those who use it to stall. A motion meant only to delay is called dilatory, and POs can rule it out of order.

## Amendments in four steps

- 1 Write it.** Put the exact change on paper: what is struck, what is inserted, and where.
- 2 Check it is germane.** In most chambers an amendment must relate to the legislation (be germane). A change that adds an unrelated topic can be ruled out.
- 3 Hand it to the PO.** In many chambers the PO checks the wording, may read it aloud and asks for a second.
- 4 Debate and vote.** The chamber debates the amendment, then votes. If it passes, debate continues on the legislation as amended.

Rules about whether the amendment's author may speak on it, and how many speeches are allowed, vary by league.

## The previous question: ending debate

When the chamber has heard enough, a member moves the previous question. If it passes by the required vote, debate stops and the PO calls the vote on the legislation. Smart timing: move it when arguments are repeating, not because you want to avoid being a later speaker.

**Model script:** "Madam President, I move the previous question." PO: "The previous question has been moved. Is there a second?" ... "All in favor ..."

## Pocket card

- ☐ Stand and wait to be recognized unless the rules say you may speak immediately
- ☐ State the motion cleanly, then sit
- ☐ Know your league's vote thresholds (write them on this sheet)
- ☐ Ask the parliamentarian if you are unsure, before you act

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